

Wabeno Area School District

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The Wabeno Area School District, one of the largest in the state, covers 325 square miles. The district enrolls students from four counties: Forest, Oconto, Marinette, and Langlade. Because the rural district is so far reaching, some students live up to 25 miles away from the schools—closer than the nearest traffic light, which is about 45 miles away.

The district's two schools are three blocks from downtown Wabeno. One school houses early childhood classes through sixth grade and the other seventh-through twelfth-grade students. Caucasians make up 81.6 percent of the district's 632 students; Native Americans make up 17.4 percent (most are from the Forest County Potawatomi community); Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans each make up less than one percent of the student enrollment. Forty-six percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches is indicative of the depressed economic status of the area. There is no large industry, although a few small manufacturing businesses in Lakewood and Mountain employ a number of workers. Due to an economy based largely on logging and tourism, work is often sporadic, seasonal, and dependent on the weather. The unemployment rate is well above the state average. Furthermore, the tax-exempt status of the Nicolet National Forest and many small

parcels of tribal land further reduce the district's tax base. Consequently, this geographically large school district has a relatively small tax base.

However, some positive economic developments are occurring. A recent block grant to the town of Wabeno has added an economic spark that could help revitalize the Forest County area. The Potawatomi-built casino and hotel have also added employment. Furthermore, the casino has attracted a number of people; some that vacationed in the Wabeno area as children are now fulfilling a dream to live there. Cottages that were once only summer homes are being renovated, and several very nice, new homes are being built as cottages are torn down. These developments have added to the district's tax base.

Despite economic constraints, Wabeno School District residents make expenditures for school improvement a priority, as evidenced by a \$3,000,000 high school addition and remodeling project scheduled for completion in the summer of 1998. This was the second building referendum to pass in the last decade. The elementary school, built in 1963, added seven classrooms and an office in 1993.

Furthermore, residents are concerned about academic achievement. For example, a group of parents recently approached the school board to advocate for smaller class sizes in the primary grades. The board eventually decided to hire an additional second-grade teacher, keep aides in the kindergartens, and have an aide for third grade so that the adult-to-student ratio would be lower for K-3 students.

In short, this far-reaching four-county community that the schools provide community space in which everyone shares, and the community shows

support for its schools in a variety of ways. In the words of the district's school social worker, "The community is real supportive of the schools; that's one of the reasons it is so great to work here. I feel the school is part of the community. It is not the 'school' versus the 'community.'"

Implementation Strategies

Community involvement and support are key aspects in the district's planning and implementation of prevention and wellness programs, with prevention issues and strategies emerging from the community. Working together to develop and maintain programs and provide funds to support them, the community, school board, school administration, and staff have provided a solid base for prevention efforts in the district.

Community Involvement and Support

The school board has been stable in its makeup and has a good working relationship with the administration. Both strongly support school-based prevention efforts. School and community members have cooperated on a mission statement and strategic plan for the district that reflects the importance of health and prevention issues: "As a culturally diverse community, the School District of Wabeno Area will work in harmony with respect for one another, providing a safe and superior learning environment, enabling individuals to reach their fullest potential and become caring, contributing life-long learners in our ever-changing local and global society."

Another key to successful prevention programming in the Wabeno Area School District is the "cross-fertilization" of ideas and the collaboration that resulted from regular communication among groups concerned with prevention. Community volunteers, school district staff, and students themselves have also worked to expand resiliency factors in the community.

Regional and State Support

In addition to using funds from the local district budget to develop its programs, the Wabeno Area School District uses Federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act entitlements, administered by a Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 8 consortium as well as competitive State AOD Program grants administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Through the CESA 8 Safe and Drug Free Schools

Consortium, the district has participated in monthly networking meetings with other districts; gained access to resources, staff development opportunities, and student leadership development opportunities; and participated in CESA-facilitated school-community forums to identify local prevention issues. The district has also competed successfully for the past several years for State AOD Program Grants. These have been used for prevention and leadership training for students; staff development; initiation of the DARE, FAST, and Brainworks programs (described in subsequent sections); and to partially fund the part-time ATOD coordinator position. The district has chosen to partially fund ongoing implementation of these programs and has actively sought supplemental funding from the community. Community members have assisted in the process of acquiring such grants as well as other funding for prevention programs.

Healthy School Environment

The district's mission statement reflects its concern for providing a learning environment in which *all* students can reach their potential. Clean and well-maintained buildings that express pride in education and a sense of community are a reflection of this concern, as is the "Special Adventures" program for elementary students. Volunteer adult readers work together with guidance counselors to read and discuss books dealing with special health-care needs of children, with the goal of increasing sensitivity and acceptance of persons with physical and mental challenges.

The district is making attempts to meet the needs as well as recognize the assets of its large Native American student population. The district recognizes the importance of cultural influence, an asset to be honored and one that can also build resiliency in young people, and is striving to learn more about cultural values and traditions as well as ways to communicate with Native American parents. For example, the district was involved in Talking Circles, a tradition of the Potawatomi, in which tribal members and school staff members discussed ways the school district and Native American community might work more closely together.

Students have many opportunities to be included in decisions that affect them. They are represented on the district's technology and discipline committees, the county partnership, student coun-

cils, and in each class as they help develop classroom rules. Peer mediation and peer education (discussed in more detail in the Student Programs section) offer other opportunities for students to have a positive impact on school environment.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The Wabeno Area School District has integrated the topics of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse prevention; violence and safety; and nutrition into the curriculum at all grade levels. Information on HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy are also discussed at the middle and high school levels. The district social worker, ATOD coordinator, guidance counselor, and teachers communicate about their place in the curriculum for ATOD, protective behaviors, resiliency, and youth development issues. This is done largely through the Prevention Issues Advisory Committee (detailed in the Family and Community Connections section), one-to-one contact, and sending interdisciplinary teams to prevention curriculum writing sessions at CESA 8. The collaboration has resulted in a curriculum that is sequential and appropriate at all grade levels.

The ATOD coordinator works closely with elementary staff to promote inclusion of health and prevention information. Project Charlie, a 24-week peer education program (discussed in more detail under Student Programs), is presented in grades 2, 4, and 6 by trained high school students. Fifth graders participate in DARE as a precursor to entering middle school, where changes in friends and interests often take place. Students enjoy DARE, and the program is popular among fifth graders. The DARE officer also presents lessons annually in kindergarten and in other classrooms as requested.

Life Skills sessions for eighth graders are held weekly for 12 weeks in small groups with trained adult co-facilitators from district staff and the community. Groups provide an opportunity for students to discuss decision making and chemical awareness and to learn and practice decision making and self-protective skills prior to the stress of high school.

At the high school level, the ATOD coordinator has worked closely with the driver's education, science, health, and family and consumer education staff and looks forward to increasing integration of ATOD issues into other areas of the high school curriculum.

Pupil Services

The district employs a school social worker, elementary and high school guidance counselors and a school psychologist. The Forest County Health Department provides nursing services as requested, including classroom presentation, immunizations, and screenings. In each building, staff who are EMTs are prepared to handle health emergencies that may arise until the Wabeno Rescue Squad arrives.

Staff in these four core Pupil Services disciplines do not meet regularly as a team but communicate frequently. With the exception of the school nurse, they also participate regularly in the Because Everyone Always Cares Here (BEACH) teams that were formally organized in 1995. The two BEACH teams (one for elementary and one for middle/high school) are the primary means of coordinating pupil services; they provide recommendations, referrals, and resolutions for student problems. The teams meet regularly (weekly at the elementary level and less often at the high school), often including the ATOD coordinator, building principal, speech and language therapist, exceptional needs teachers, school secretary, Peer Mediation coordinator, and Native-American Home-School coordinator. The inclusion of additional staff reflects the school district's challenge of meeting diverse student needs across a large, economically depressed area. In particular, the Native American Home-School coordinator is a critical member of the team. This person has knowledge of students' cultural and family background, understands how family and culture affect students' ability to be academically successful, and is helpful in assessing students' potential.

Student Programs

District staff members express very positive feelings about the availability and quality of Student Programs, and the percentage of students participating in these activities is very high. The high participation levels may be partly due to the lack of nearby movie theaters, game rooms, or malls. Students don't need to try out for athletic teams, so most can play if interested and academically eligible. Thus, a high percentage of students spend time in supervised activities with adults who care about them, a factor that promotes resiliency. In addition to athletics and the usual range of school-sponsored social activities, programs offered in this component of the Framework

in the Wabeno Area School District can be broadly categorized as leadership training, student assistance programs, and peer mediation/education. These are described below, while those with the most significant community involvement are described in the upcoming section on Family and Community Connections.

Leadership Training

Student Council: Student councils are active at both the elementary school and middle/ high school. Students participate in annual leadership training opportunities and are advocates for the student body on numerous issues. Members also plan alternative activities for students and teacher-appreciation activities.

Other Leadership Activities: Annually, 10 to 12 sixth-grade student leaders write a student mini-grant, attend a middle school teen institute, return with an action plan they've developed, and carry it out. The district also sends teen leaders to other leadership training, such as the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, the Department of Public Instruction tobacco prevention training, and high school teen institutes. They return with action plans and carry them out in an effort to make a difference in the community.

Student Assistance Programs

Because Everyone Always Cares Here (BEACH) Teams: After several years of training and planning, the district has student assistance teams in each building. The teams, previously described in the Pupil Services section, receive referrals from staff, the community, and students. BEACH teams also coordinate delivery of services and facilitate communication among staff members. The elementary team meets weekly, and the team for grades seven through 12 meets about once every three weeks.

Banana Splits: Initiated in 1995 by the school social worker and elementary guidance counselor, Banana Splits is an eight-week support group at the elementary level for youth whose parents are going through separation or divorce. After completion of the group, former participants continue to meet for continued support at a monthly group lunch. Other support groups, including such topics as anger management, concerned persons, and teen issues, are offered as the need arises.

Peer Programs

Peer Mediation: A peer mediation program is active in the elementary building. Trained fifth and sixth graders work with elementary students who are involved in disputes. Mediators wear readily identifiable vests on the playground during afternoon recess.

Peer Educators: Twenty-eight percent of high school students in the Wabeno Area School District help other students through peer mentoring, peer education, or peer tutoring at the elementary school. Peer educators have been involved in substance abuse education since 1984 and Spanish education since 1993. Staff from community agencies contract with the district to provide training for students involved in peer education. Training for peer educators in substance abuse includes peer-refusal skills. Teens who participate in these programs gain leadership and communication skills as well as experience working with different age groups, developmental abilities, and needs. Elementary students are provided with role models within the classroom and are given the expectation that they too will some day care for others in the community. Peer education programs also build community assets by providing a structure for students to learn from one another. Not only are participating students committed to peer education, but elementary and high school teachers are willing to release them to participate in training, tutoring, or mentoring during school hours. For some students, mentoring or tutoring become service learning projects. Many teachers attempt to incorporate service learning activities into their class schedules.

Project Charlie: Many high school youth volunteer time and skills for *Project Charlie: Chemical Abuse Resolution Lies in Education*, an AODA prevention program first instituted in Minneapolis. Teams of trained high school students teach second, fourth and sixth graders once a week for about 24 weeks on such topics as self-esteem, relationships, decision making, and chemical awareness.

Clowning for Prevention: About 15-20 high school students participate annually in presenting four lessons to primary grades on social skills. They participate in the districtwide Family Fun Fair Day, visit local nursing homes, and appear at other events as requested. These students are trained both in clowning and in peer education.

Adult Programs

Staff Development

The Prevention Issues Advisory Committee (discussed in the next section) suggests areas of need for staff development in prevention programming to the district's Staff Development Committee, which also surveys staff annually to ascertain their needs. In addition to participating in district staff development activities, staff are encouraged to attend prevention training and classes that are partially subsidized by prevention grant funds. In addition, the district has an Employee Assistance Program that began in 1991.

Parenting Programs

The district is involved in educating parents in a variety of ways. Parenting classes have been held in the district on a regular basis since 1992, with leaders trained by Joan Lefebvre, University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Family Living Agent for Vilas, Forest, and Florence counties. The district provides a support group for parents of students with Attention Deficit Disorder. In addition, Head Start, Title I preschool, early childhood, and kindergarten teachers work closely with parents of young children. The district has sponsored two community awareness workshops and scheduled community presentations for speakers who address students on prevention issues. Finally, all school families receive a quarterly district newsletter that includes parenting tips and information on prevention programs.

Family and Community Connections

The school is the nucleus of the area; the community participates in a variety of programs to support the Wabeno Area School District and the health and resilience of its students. These multiple ways of strengthening family, school, and community connections include family-school organizations, community volunteers in the schools, advisory committees, and positive student activities.

Family-School Organizations

Home/School Association: The Wabeno Area School District Home/School Association, which is similar to a Parent-Teachers Association, began in 1995 and is a significant part of the school and

community structure. The organization meets monthly and provides an opportunity for families and staff to meet each other on a personal basis and to work together to actively support each child's education. It also sponsors an annual Family Fun Fair Day and compiles a school/community calendar on which schools, civic organizations, and businesses list events and regularly scheduled meetings. This calendar is both a useful community service and a fundraiser for the group. Parents and administrators have decided to open the Association to all community members, including those who do not have children enrolled in district schools. The potential effect of including nonparents in the Home/School Association is that more community members will have an impact on student's education and will understand both the daily constraints faced by district staff and administration as well as staff and student successes.

Families and Schools Together (FAST): The district's FAST program has existed for five years. A unique feature of this positive program in the district is that it strives to improve relationships across cultural groups by having half the FAST families be Native American and the other half be non-Native American. FAST receives funding from the DPI, the district, the Forest County Potawatomi Community, Community Mental Health Services, and the Community Mental Health Foundation.

Community Volunteers in the Schools

Parents: Parents and other adults responsible for students' care, especially the care of elementary-age students, are encouraged to come to the school at any time. Despite the distances that must be traveled, parent volunteers can be found in the elementary school on a daily basis and on at least a weekly basis at the junior/senior high school. They tutor, work in the library, and serve as field trip chaperones. These volunteers also help with the three-to five-year-old screening, the "Book It" program, fundraisers, Poetry Week, and "Drop Everything and Read Week." Parent participation in the school provides encouragement and community interaction with students and illustrates the importance of education.

Adult Mentors: The district has adult mentors for some students in grades seven through 12, and high school students as well as adults mentor elementary students.

Forest County Health Department: The Forest County Health Department comes to the elementary school regularly to offer free immunizations assist with human growth and development classes, and conduct nutrition education for targeted grade levels. Relationships with local and county law enforcement and social services are also positive.

Project Brain Works: Even retired teachers volunteer within the Wabeno Area School District. Project Brain Works involves retired teachers doing after-school enrichment and after-school remedial programs for grades one through 12. Initially funded by the Department of Public Instruction with an After School/Summer School grant, Project Brain Works continues to use community members as resources for students.

Special Days: A number of programs incorporate people from the community into students' educational experience. These programs bring community and students together in a way that promotes positive feelings. One is so popular that the elementary school has run out of chairs; Grandparents' Day fills the gymnasium every year. Hobby Day gives third through sixth graders a chance to choose two sessions in which people from the community teach their hobbies. Career Day provides high school students opportunities to learn about potential careers from workers in a variety of fields. A Youth Service Learning Partnership allows students to job shadow school personnel for a day.

School-Community Advisory Councils

Prevention Issues Advisory Committee: The Prevention Issues Advisory Committee was formed in 1988 when Federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act funds became available. The committee consists of staff, parents, school board members, clergy, health professionals, law enforcement, tribal representatives, the 4H youth extension agent, representatives from the county ATOD program, and members from PLAY (described below). They work together to coordinate prevention programs and strategies for many issues, including AIDS/HIV, child abuse and neglect, suicide and crisis intervention, alcohol and other drug abuse, pregnancy, and human growth and development.

Forest County Partnership: The Forest County Partnership consists of the district's home/school

coordinator, ATOD coordinator, school social worker, and student representatives as well as representatives from the county mental health and community ATOD programs, social services, law enforcement, tribal community members, county extension, and clergy. The group meets monthly and has sponsored such activities as the annual Making Healthy Choices full-day workshop for all eighth graders in the county, crisis intervention, the Teen Assessment Project survey, the DARE program, a 101 Things to Do Day, and a gang awareness workshop. Many community members who do not have children attending school in the district also choose to be involved in these prevention activities; they model positive community values and concern for others.

Supporting Positive Student Activities

Positive Leadership for Adults and Youth: A community-based group, Positive Leadership for Adults and Youth (PLAY) began in 1984 as a way to reduce drinking and provide alternative activities to underage youth. When it was determined that preventive, recreational services for students were needed, PLAY worked closely with the school district to include alternative activities for students and to support student assistance programming in the schools. PLAY also provides activities for students in grades kindergarten through 12, including open gyms, and provides food and activities for post-prom, post-homecoming, and post-class night for seniors. Finally, the group offers volunteer recognition of students and adults involved in substance abuse education.

Wabeno Logrollers Booster Club: A Booster Club, including community members, supports the district's athletic programs and offers recognition to participating students, alumni, and coaches. It plays a vital role in fostering school and community spirit. A person need not have children to participate in the Booster Club. Just as all youth can participate in athletics without "trying out," all community members can cheer for the school's teams.

"We Love Our Students' Day": "We Love Our Students' Day" for middle and high school students is supported by donations from the community. The School District designed an event to honor teens who are responsible citizens but may not be on the honor roll. Drawings are held throughout the day for prizes, and teens that are on the honor roll go on a "coffee-less break."

Future Directions

The Wabeno Area School District looks forward to working more closely with the Native American community and to the opportunity to better meet the needs and celebrate the strengths of all students. The district also wants to continue to create a more respectful, safe, and risk-free learning environment for all students and to help all students and their families feel welcome in the schools. The district is interested in offering more diversity programs and multicultural education to students to help them better understand one another. The district recognizes the importance of cultural influence as an asset to be honored, one that can also build resiliency in youth.

Furthermore, the district is eager to educate all staff on ways to foster resiliency in students and to develop programming that nurtures stu-

dent assets. Rather than focusing on the negative, the district will continue to focus on the positive in students and their families, building on their strengths. Over the next three to five years, the school district expects to expand Project Brain Works and provide more support groups for students.

The Wabeno Area School District is discussing ways to deliver AIDS prevention information in a consistent and age-appropriate manner to elementary students and to develop a curriculum plan for this level. This elementary plan will provide a solid foundation on which the currently existing curriculum plan for upper grade levels can build.

Finally, the district will enhance its prevention and wellness programs by continuing to make use of available entitlements and competitive funds as well as program support from CESA 8 and the Department of Public Instruction.